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Taft, William Howard

An address at Swarthmore college, Swarthmore...

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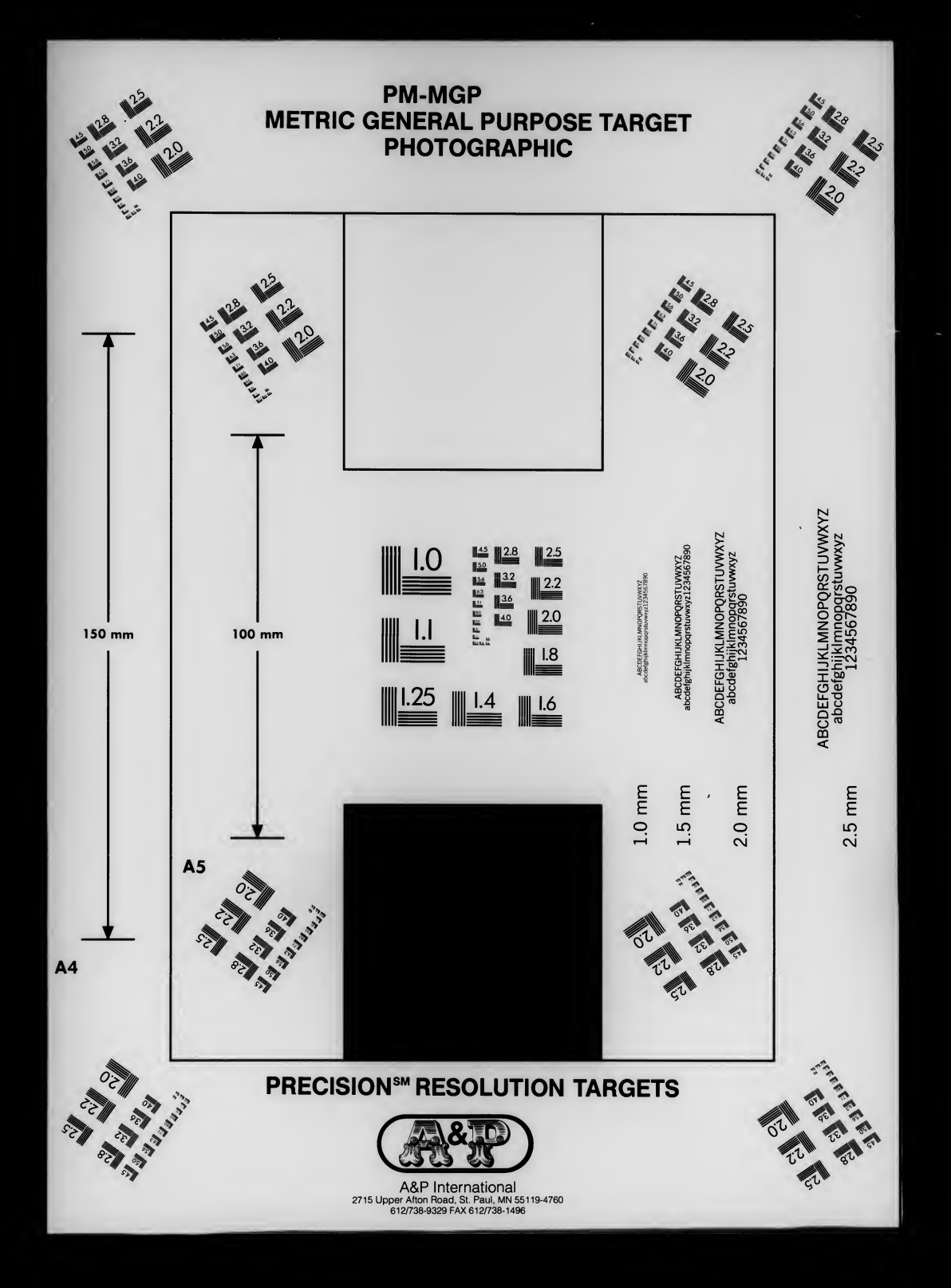

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An Address

Made by

HONORABLE WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT

at

Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pa.

June 16, 1915

The Church, Civilization and War

Sent out with the Compliments of George H. Paine, Philadelphia, Pa.

ADDRESS OF WILLIAM H. TAFT AT SWARTHMORE COLLEGE, SWARTHMORE, PENNSYLVANIA, JUNE 16, 1915.

(Corrected Copy.)

THE CHURCH, CIVILIZATION AND WAR.

The history of religious liberty and tolerance must be one which the members of the Society of Friends study with pride. Erasmus of the few in the sixteenth century believed in it, and resented the restrictions upon him, a priest of the church, which a different view entailed. The persecution of one church instead of being a lesson to its victims stirred them and the followers of their creed to counter persecutions when power came into their hands. The Papists and the Puritans conceded the logic of each other by the same intolerance, and the Puritans of New England who sought her rocky shores for freedom to worship God, declined to permit others to exercise the same freedom and banished Roger Williams to his providential colony of Rhode Island, which became a refuge for all those who dissented from the tenets of Puritan theology and practices. Almost alone among the schismatics the Friends, the followers of George Fox, were consistent, and as they resented persecution of themselves by others, they granted the benefits of tolerance to others when they came to establish a state in Pennsylvania and New Jersey; and now, for more than two hundred and fifty years, the Friends, firm in their religious convictions and life have defended and maintained religious liberty, and have lived to see the stiff, rigid Puritanism of New England, through the very strength and force of the individual responsibility to God that Puritan theology taught, come to the same view of the necessity for independence of religious thought and toleration of differences in religious creed. Jefferson and Madison in Virginia in resisting the

establishment of a state church, and in their insistence upon religious freedom, created another force in the formative stages of our government that led to the embodiment in our fundamental law of the declaration that

"Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof", and of the further provision that

"No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any public office or public trust under the United States."

These restrictions apply only to the Federal Government, and so far as the Federal Constitution is concerned, any state might establish a church and appropriate money for its support. There were established churches in some of the colonies. There were religious qualifications for voters and religious qualifications for office required in several of the states, but these have all faded away. There is no established church in any state, and the declarations of the Federal Constitution merely reflect the fundamental law of each independent state. This condition, so different from that of all of the European countries at the time of our independence, gave rise to the impression that the spirit of our civilization and people was against churches, or, at any rate, that it was that of indifference toward churches; and this impression was heightened by the supposed attitude of some of our public men on the subject.

In our treaty with Tripoli of 1797, we find this singular recital:

> "As the Government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility of Mussulmen; and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mohammedan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony between the two countries."

What I wish to emphasize this morning is that the separation of church and state and this establishment of religious liberty and toleration are not in the slightest degree inconsistent with the most favorable attitude on the part of the government toward the maintenance and encouragement of religion and the churches which promote it. Many of the states have express declarations in favor of religion, and nearly all of them directly aid the churches by exempting church property from the burdens of taxation. Chaplains are employed in the army and navy and teach and preach religion to the men of those services. The sessions of both Houses of Congress are opened with the prayers of clergymen, and the courts of the various states have frequently declared that the Christian religion was a part of the common law of their respective states. This was the declaration made by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania in the contest over the will of Stephen Girard, which especially stipulated that no minister should be permitted to enter the college which he proposed to establish. While the will was sustained, the fact that this is a Christian country was recognized by the court, and that fact has been authoritatively recognized by the Supreme Court of the United States in a number of cases. Mr. Justice Miller, in Campbell v. Holt, 115 U. S. 632, used this language:

> "The name of the Supreme Being does not occur in the Constitution; yet our national being is founded on a tacit recognition of His justice and goodness, and the eternal obligation of His laws."

As late as 1892, in the case of the Church of the Holy Trinity v. the United States, a much more specific declaration on this subject was made. In that case E. Walpole Warren, an alien, was a minister of the Episcopal Church residing in England. He made a contract with the Holy Trinity Church of New York to remove to the city of New York and enter into its service as rector and pastor, and in pursuance of the contract, he moved to New York and entered upon the service. It was claimed by the United

States that the Holy Trinity Church in making such a contract, had violated what was known as the alien contract labor law, which made it unlawful and a penal offence for any corporation to encourage the importation of any alien into the United States under a contract entered into previous to the importation of such alien, to perform labor or service of any kind in the United States. The court held that the contract for service as a clergyman was exactly within the terms of the statute, but declined to give the statute a literal construction, and it did so on the ground that the evident intent of Congress was simply to stay the influx of cheap unskilled labor, and that no purpose of action against religion could be imputed to congressional legislation because this is a religious people. Mr. Justice Brewer pointed out that the recognition of God and the importance of religion were emphasized in every colonial charter, and instanced among others that granted by William Penn to the Province of Pennsylvania in 1701, in words beginning: "Because no people can be truly happy, though under the greatest enjoyment of civil liberties, if abridged of the freedom of their conscience, as to their religious profession and worship; and Almighty God being the only Lord of Conscience, Father of Lights and Spirits; and the Author as well as object of all divine knowledge, faith and worship, who only doth enlighten the minds, and persuade and convince the understandings of people, I do hereby grant and declare, etc."

Mr. Justice Brewer finally concludes, after specific evidences from almost every state, that this is a Christian nation, and says:

> "If we pass beyond these matters to a view of American life, as expressed by its laws, its business, its customs and its society, we find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth. Among other matters note the following: The form of oath universally prevailing, concluding with an appeal to the Almighty; the custom of opening sessions of all deliberative bodies and most conventions with prayer; the prefatory words of all wills, 'In the name of God, amen'; the laws respecting the observance of the Sabbath, with the gen-

eral cessation of all secular business, and the closing of courts, legislatures, and other similar public assemblies on that day; the churches and church organizations which abound the city, town and hamlet; the multitude of charitable organizations existing everywhere under Christian auspices; the gigantic missionary associations, with general support, and aiming to establish Christian missions in every quarter of the globe. These, and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organized utterances that this is a Christian nation. In the face of all these, shall it be believed that a Congress of the United States intended to make it a misdemeanor for a church of this country to contract for the services of a Christian minister residing in another nation?"

When I was deputed by President Roosevelt to visit Rome and confer with Leo XIII, in order to settle the questions which had arisen in our taking over the Philippine Islands, with reference to the ownership of the Friars' lands, it became my duty to make an address to the head of the Roman Church, and I ventured in that address to assure the Pope that he could count with entire certainty upon the justice which the United States would show in dealing with the religious orders in the Philippines, both in respect of their religious freedom and in respect to their property rights. Indeed I ventured to say that I thought he could count on greater liberality in this latter regard than he had found in dealing with countries that claimed to be daughters of the Roman church. I sought to emphasize the fact that the separation of church and state in this country did not involve the slightest hostility on the part of the government to any church or especial friendship for any, but only equal protection and encouragement to all. I insisted that this government in every way possible except that of establishing a particular state church, encouraged the cause of religion, and that it relied on the church as the chief pillar of the state in the promotion of morality and the cultivation of Christian brotherhood.

I have chosen my subject today with the hope of emphasizing the importance of the church from the standpoint of successful secular government, and of the spread of civilization. I desire also to point out the useful influence of the church in the mitigation of the severities of war and the promotion of a return of fraternal feeling among the nations when this awful sacrifice of life and treasure that we are now witnessing with horror shall have ceased. It has been my lot to be the executive head of nearly eight millions of an Oriental people, ten thousand miles from here, and also of this great American people, and to have had other experience in the conduct of the governments of both. The longer and more intimate my experience with government, the more deeply impressed have I become with the tremendous importance that the church plays in making popular government what it ought to be and in vindicating it as the best kind of a government that an intelligent people can establish. The necessity for the infusion of the religious spirit into the prevailing morality for the purpose of giving it life and persistent influence, is a fact that every one who studies a people from the position of a responsible administrator of government must recognize. There are doubtless those who live a moral and upright life who are not conscious of religious faith or feeling or fervor, but whatever may be the case, in exceptional cases, it is the presence of religion and its vivifying quality that keeps the ideals of people high and brings their life and practice more nearly into conformity with those ideals. The study of man's relation to his Creator and his responsibility for his life to God, energizes his moral inclinations, strengthens his self-restraint, prompts his sense of fraternal obligation and makes him the good citizen without whom popular government would be a failure. We are therefore concerned in a public way that the ministers of religion should be drawn from the ablest and the best in the community, from those whose education and natural strength of intellect, powers of persuasion, foresight and prophecy should give them the means of maintain-

ing the influence of the church and bringing home to its people its inspiration.

The church enters largely into the life of a people, and it is impossible for it to avoid reflecting their tendencies. From the resumption of specie payments after the war, until a decade ago, our people were engaged in enormous material expansion. Their activities and interests were absorbed in a mad chase for wealth. I would not minimize the great advantages in the increase of wealth per capita and the great spread of prosperity and the very extended distribution of wealth and in the average improvement of the individual in the creature and domestic comforts. In all this material progress, however, the spiritual, moral and religious side of life necessarily suffered somewhat. It was a necessary result of the complete absorption of the public mind in a financial growth and development that startled the world. The churches were affected by it. The professions were commercialized, and business life attracted the most brilliant and active minds, while a profession like that of the clergyman, in which the emoluments were always small, and in which life was a series of heavy sacrifices, and a course of severely plain living and high thinking, did not attract as many of the strong young men who came on as the interest of the people and society required.

A change has come over our nation. The people have halted with some shame at their forgetfulness. There has been a spread of the fraternal spirit. We have paused in the chase for the dollar and turned about to see if we cannot help our brethren who have not been so fortunate and who have not shared the general prosperity. Our politics have been purified and corporations driven out of them, the danger of plutocracy has been avoided, and new ideals have formed among the people. Those who have been favored by fortune with large wealth have seemed to feel more deeply their responsibility as trustees for its use to help their fellowmen. Fraternal organizations and associations have increased greatly in number and poor people and people of moderate

means have manifested their consciousness that upon them too is the obligation to promote the doing of good among men.

In no institution of our society has this spirit shown itself more intense than among the churches. There is greater team work, if I may use that expression, among all the churches of the community than there ever was before. Each is a nucleus for philanthropic, charitable, educational, spiritual and uplifting work. Each congregation feels a responsibility for the community about it and the activities of various kinds which have enlarged the scope of church functions are too many to enumerate. Today we do not have sermons in the churches discussing doctrinal differences or denominational advantages or controversies. If one would read sermons of one hundred or two hundred years ago and have patience to run through the long disquisitions on what seem now unimportant and verbal niceties in the statement of creed, he would find it impossible to believe that people listened for hours at a time to such sermons and felt spiritually and intellectually refreshed. If such a discussion were repeated today, the pews would either be empty or used only for purposes of slumber. The theme of the sermons of today is the discussion of duty to one's fellows growing out of our common filial relation to God, and the cultivation of that humility and fervor of spirit which will make one fulfill his religious duty as a member of the family, a member of society, a citizen, and a son of God. You can sit in most churches and hear the sermons and not distinguish between them as to creed or doctrine. This has undoubtedly liberalized religion. It has reduced the undue importance heretofore attached to dogma without weakening the vital essence of the religious spirit and faith. There has been a great movement toward church unity and it ought to be greater. The force of churches has been wasted in the denominational differences that have led to the attempted maintenance of three or four churches in a small community where there is only enough of a congregation properly to support one church. This is not a useful instance of Chris-

tian emulation. A profession in which such weakening division exists discourages men from entering it, and between those churches in which there is but little difference in creed. we must hope for a successful movement toward union. I have seen such a movement in the Philippines where missionary work was being done, in which the various denominations that had come into the Islands divided up the territory and assigned to one denomination certain districts, to another denomination certain other districts, and in this way covered the whole field. This was no violation of the anti-trust act.

It seems to me that there is room for the same improvement in this country, and that a union of three or four struggling, almost dying congregations into one strong church will attract and support a minister who can add to the religious life of the community and strengthen the moral forces that make for its righteousness.

This weakening of the influence of the church, for lack of greater church unity, cannot be charged to the ministers themselves. It is the existing system, the faults of which they find difficulty in remedying; and I cannot think that the diatribes against the ministers that are made often by a sincere revivalist help the church or church influence. We live in an age when the vogue is to love denunciation of somebody or some thing. It seems to exalt the speaker and to gratify his audience by the subtle impression that such Philippics are a complaint to those whom he is addressing, in the implication that they are much better than those whom he is attacking. He is summoning them into the judgment seat and clothing them with the dignity and power of judges. Proper respect for a church should carry respect for its minister, and the community is better if the minister can be surrounded by those conditions which will make for his greater influence and greater authority. I am not advocating excessive change in the matter of denominational union but only that it shall take place in communities where division spells weakness and defeat. The spirit of the age is toward co-operation, and why shouldn't we have it among the churches as well? The Young Men's Christian Association shows what numerous benefits can come from undenominational, spiritual and religious effort, guided by practical common sense.

My life has fallen in places in which the importance of the spread of civilization of foreign Christian missions has deeply impressed itself upon me. It may be bringing coals to Newcastle for me to speak on this subject in the presence of the Society of Friends, for the missionary spirit manifested itself in George Fox and William Penn and all the early leaders of that Society. Among the noble array of principles, the lasting virtue of which has now come to be recognized, and which the Friends were among the first to advance and live by, were religious liberty, foreign missions, education, philanthropy and peace, and I might add the equal training, responsibility and voice of women. My advocacy of foreign missions and my interest in their successful growth are not, I hope, based on a narrow view of other than the Christian religions. I think that possibly the early spirit of sectarian missions was narrowing in its bitter opposition to other religions. It held them in contempt. The wider, more catholic, and I think I may say the more Christian spirit that actuates them now recognizes the good there is in the great religion like the Mohammedan and Buddhist in keeping before the minds of the followers of those religions the importance of their relation to God. The proper benefit which the Christian religion gives them is in enlarging their religious views to appreciate the ever-loving fatherhood and close companionship of God, the importance in His eyes of the individual and the mitigation of the sternness and aloofness of the God of their religions. The Christian missions have performed a great office with the Pagan peoples. By their good works in establishing hospitals and furnishing medical aid, in founding schools, and in the sacrifices that the missionaries and their families make to help the people with whom they live, they have offered to those peoples an incontestable evidence of the spirit of the Christian religion whose ministers they are. While they may not have converted as many to Christianity

from the other religions as one might wish, from a statistician's point of view, considering the expenditure of life and money and effort in the work, they have founded centers of influence and power among the millions of peoples which each year and each decade are spreading the idea that government is for the welfare of the people, and associating Christianity with Democracy. No one can look into the political changes that are now being effected in China, in India, in Africa, by the heads of the Christian missions, without understanding what a powerful agency they are in the advance of civilization. The heads of the missions are consulted by the leaders of political thought who are real rulers of the people in all these countries. Even where they do not themselves profess the Christian religion, such leaders recognize the position that the missions have attained in the respect and confidence of the people with whom they have worked, and they consult the missionaries as disinterested advisers who are earnest in promoting the weal of their people. Then another agency of a missionary character but with a little different organization is that of the Young Men's Christian Association, and the religious university and college union established by that world Christian statesman, John R. Mott. He has sought to bind the peoples of the world by fixing a common spirit in the college men of all the universities of the world, Mohammedan, Buddhist and Christian, and in the recognition of religions other than Christianity and their usefulness, he has promoted the fraternal feeling of the world. The triumphant progress made by him and Mr. Sherwood Eddy through China and the outpouring of the Chinese to attend meetings in behalf of Christianity and its spread are startling evidences of the religious movement among that ancient people, and are an earnest of the continued success and the absolute necessity for the foreign missionary movement among a people who until recently were smug and atrophied in what seemed almost a stupor of religious contentment.

What I have said has been directed, first, toward the domestic influence and importance of the church in the

strengthening of government and the increase of its usefulness; and, second, the importance of the agency of the church in the spread of Western civilization and the gradual infiltration of the Christian democratic spirit among Pagan peoples from foreign Christian missionary centers.

I come now to the influence of the church and Christianity in respect to war and this awful struggle that now seems to present such a hopeless *impasse* to the progress of the world. When the war broke out, the newspapers were filled with communications from Christian men and women whose souls were stirred to their depths with despair at what seemed the utter failure of Christianity to prevent this chaos of cruelty and un-Christian strife. Many asserted that they had lost their faith in God or asked how they could retain it. Upon those of us who had supposed that in the long era of peace and in the apparent spread of a feeling of international brotherhood, the possibility of such a war was most remote, the sudden conflagration that broke out in the oldest and most civilized part of the world had a stunning effect, and hope seemed to have departed. The character of the war, the violation of agreements by belligerents, the inhuman features of the war that crop out from time to time and are avowedly justified by necessity, do not diminish the discouraging face of things; and when we listened to the prayers of each of the belligerents that victory might perch upon his banners, as the only righteous and Christian cause, it seemed a mockery of religion and a perversion of the proper object of prayer. The church in each country makes itself as militant for, and as sympathetic with, the cause of the state as the leader of the armed hosts.

I don't know whether this audience has had the benefit of hearing John R. Mott on the subject of the present war in Europe. Four months after the war began he visited every country engaged in it. As the leading spirit of the World's Young Men's Christian Association, and through his connections with the Intercollegiate Christian Association, he was able to come into close touch with the best religious centers of influence in each country, and he was

able to acquire as intimate a knowledge of conditions in each country as the necessarily short stay that he made in each could give one. He said that in every country he found the religious spirit absorbing every other, the spirit of self-sacrifice, of patriotism, and of a willingness to die. He said he never had seen such an abnegation of self and such intense religious fervor as that which he met in these countries at war. He agreed, however, that the religious spirit was one that looked to the God of the Old Testament and the God of battles rather than to the God of the New Testament as exemplified and pictured by Jesus Christ. He deplored the enormous losses of life and the dreadful suffering, and his statistics of existing and future destruction were heart-rending.

In spite of this dark picture, in spite of the retrograde steps that civilization has taken, we must not become pessimists, we must not lose ourselves in despair. It is not true that we have gone back to the cruelty of the Middle Ages. It is not true that we have returned to the days of Thilly and Magdeburg. It is not true that the human nature of these past centuries has changed again to the day of the berserker and the sea and the land pirate. It is true that the conditions have made apparent the fact that improved as human nature is, and better as man is on the whole and better as nations are than they ever were, circumstances may bring out their blacker and less lovely traits. The evil humors in the political conditions of Europe, the race hatreds, the greed for power and wealth, the economic jealousies, the fear by one nation of the unjust aggression of another, have all concentered and coincided to develop this world quarrel and so to disclose what we always knew was in human nature. There are silver linings to the cloud, however. Think of the self-sacrifices that many of the neutral nations are making to help the suffering of their neighboring belligerents. Think of the burden that Holland is carrying to rescue the Belgians, driven from their homes. Think of the enormous contributions that have been made from

one nation to another. Think of the Red Cross and the other organizations of this country. Think of the self-sacrifices that our doctors and nurses are making in laboring among their brothers of other countries and giving up their lives without a murmur in the struggle to suppress disease and mitigate suffering. Nor is it true that when the war is over, it will be impossible within a measurably short time to restore again the fraternal feeling that existed among the nations and seemed to grow before our eyes in the last three or four decades. Men say that never again can there be friendship between those engaged in this conflict. We have in our own country within the recollection of many to whom I speak, a refutation of such a statement. An internecine conflict, such as ours, generates much greater bitterness that between different nations, and yet no one can deny that between the North and South there has been in a generation a complete wiping out of the differences, although that war was greater than any in history up to its time.

Through all the remarks of John R. Mott, in his lecture on the war, to which I have referred, one could see that he had found himself in touch with the leading religious thought in all the countries, and that he found the bond of religious union, though severed as between the belligerents, still warm and pulsating on the part of both sides towards him. This circumstance gives one encouragement to believe that bitter as the feeling is between the warring peoples, the coming of peace will reknit the ties that seemed so strong between all these countries and made many of us hope would make impossible such an awful cataclysm and butchery as is now going on between the nations. The utter exhaustion of all the belligerents when this war is over will be so prostrating, will sink so deep into the hearts and souls of all the people, that plans to prevent the recurrence of another war will meet a spirit of acceptance more encouraging than we have ever had in the history of the world, and the influence of such world associations as the Y. M. C. A., and the churches of the Christian religion, we must count upon as an important factor.

Can we abolish war? No, not while the frailties and passions of human nature are reflected in the conduct of nations. Can we make it less probable? Yes. We can do it by international arrangements. We can do it by invoking the joint aid of many nations to stay the sanguinary hands of one or two about to appeal to the god of war. Men say treaties are nothing but scraps of paper when the war passion is on. It depends upon the moral and physical force that is to constitute the sanction of those treaties. Sometimes they will be broken. More often they will be kept. Because treaties have been broken is no reason why we should not make them again, with the hope that they will be observed. The evident trend of international public opinion will be toward a league of nations whose interest in the maintenance of world peace, and whose direct injury from allowing a war between nations to come on, though they may not themselves be engaged, will make them recognize the advantage of a union against war, and the right of part of the world to take steps to prevent the rest of the world from involving all the world in the penalties and horror of such destruction of life and such human suffering as we witness today.

Tomorrow we meet in Independence Hall to consider a plan, and to perfect its general structure, with the hope that when peace comes, we may offer it to our own government and those representing our government, in any conference of the nations, as a basis for an international union against war.

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